

Submitted by  
Rep. Schor

**Signature Stamp on Ballot Forces New Vote**  
**Lansing State Journal, October 13, 2012**  
**Mark Mayes**

Lee Abramson's opinions have remained strong despite the amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, that has robbed him of the use of his arms and legs.

And, like so many of us, the East Lansing man looks forward to expressing his views on an election ballot.

It just took extra effort this year.

Just days after Lee Abramson's mother, Janet, mailed his absentee ballot to the East Lansing City Clerk, she received a call to say he would have to vote again because he signed his ballot envelope with a signature stamp.

The signature stamp has become a necessity for Lee Abramson in the last 10 years as his ALS has progressed. He uses it for his personal papers and finances. And, Janet Abramson said she's sure he's used the stamp before to sign his absentee ballot.

But, this year, the clerk's office indicated he would have to make some mark on the ballot with his own hand.

"It sort of offended me that people who have difficult lives already should have to do everything all over again," Janet Abramson said.

**Second effort**

Still, Lee and Janet Abramsom teamed to complete his ballot a second time, and — as required — they both signed the envelope. This time, she held a pen in his hand to make an X in the appropriate boxes. She immediately mailed the ballot in.

But the second effort stayed on the mind of Janet Abramson, who wondered whether others with disabilities might run into a similar issue. What if a stroke victim or — heaven forbid — a wounded veteran had an absentee ballot disqualified due to a signature technicality?

The issue comes down to the interpretation of the election law which says: "If the applicant for registration is unable to write, then he shall execute the registration affidavit by making his mark ..."

The East Lansing worker who checked absentee ballot signatures interpreted that to mean each voter had to leave an original mark, not use a reproducible stamp, East Lansing City Clerk Marie McKenna said. McKenna since has sought clarification on the point from Michigan election officials.

"We were basing it on our understanding that the law is 'You have to leave your own mark by your own hand,'" she said.

"If (the state says) a stamp is the same as it is with your own hand, I'm great with that."

**Good intentions**

McKenna apologized for her office's inconsistency in handling Lee Abramson's ballots. She also said the office worker who contacted Janet Abramson had only good intentions, wanting to ensure Lee Abramson's ballot would not end up disqualified.

The Michigan Department of State concurs with East Lansing's interpretation of the law, spokesman Fred Woodhams said.

An original mark, rather than a stamp that could be picked up by anyone, helps preserve election integrity, he said.

"The law specifies that they need a signature," Woodhams said. "A mark does suffice, but it makes no mention of a stamp."